

Acts 21:15-36 “The Blessings of Peace and Persecution” 1.25.15

Intro. Imagine being invited to a gay wedding, you're concerned about endorsing or seeming to approve behavior the Bible declares wrong. Do you go? Why or why not?

Subject: Paul's pursuit of peace ends in persecution

Object: Pursue peace and prepare for persecution

Context: Paul traveling to Jerusalem to deliver financial support from the Gentile churches for the Jewish church at Jerusalem. Paul repeatedly warned he would suffer.

A. Paul's pursuit of peace [15-26]

1. Paul reported all God did among the Gentiles [15-20]

15And after those days we packed and went up to Jerusalem. **16**Also some of the disciples from Caesarea went with us and brought with them a certain Mnason (Nayson) of Cyprus, an early disciple, with whom we were to lodge: Paul & his team travel from Caesarea to Jerusalem @ 50 mi. overland [Nayson to host **17**And when we had come to Jerusalem, the brethren received us gladly: Paul's missionary journeys end with arrival @ Jerusalem & gift from the Gentile churches **18**On the following *day* Paul went in with us to James, and all the elders were present. **19**When he had greeted them, he told in detail those things which God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry. **20**And when they heard *it*, they glorified the Lord: Paul reported to James the half-brother of Jesus, leader of the church at Jerusalem, came to faith after the Resurrection, wrote “James.” Brought Luke, Titus, and Timothy as ambassadors from the Gentile churches and as evidence of the work God did among the Gentiles. Paul testifies to what God had done among the Gentiles. The leaders glorify the Lord [20]!

a. When God is working issues arise about rituals and religious freedom

i. Cf. Jesus and Pharisees re hand washing, Sabbath works, food

2. Paul learns of the conflict with Jewish Christians about the Law [20-22]

20 And they said to him, “You see, brother, how many myriads of Jews there are who have believed, and they are all zealous for the law; **21**but they have been informed about you that you teach all the Jews who are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, saying that they ought not to circumcise *their* children nor to walk according to the customs. **22**What then? The assembly must certainly meet, for they will hear that you have come: Jewish church was growing and was zealous for the law. They were concerned that Paul told Jews outside of Israel to forsake the Mosaic Law and circumcision.

a. We are made right with God by faith in Christ not rituals

i. **Issue:** should Jewish believers continue to observe Jewish cultural practices?

b. Christians have liberty to observe rituals that are not prohibited in the Bible

* Passover Seder at nexus [*cf. going to RC Mass vs. praying to Mary]

Cf. Baptism (and Communion) as rituals that are commanded [*Baptism today!*]

3. Paul observed a ritual to seek peace and reach others for Christ [23-26]

23Therefore do what we tell you: We have four men who have taken a vow. **24**Take them and be purified with them, and pay their expenses so that they may shave *their* heads, and that all may know that those things of which they

were informed concerning you are nothing, but *that* you yourself also walk orderly and keep the law.²⁵ But concerning the Gentiles who believe, we have written *and* decided that they should observe no such thing, except that they should keep themselves from *things* offered to idols, from blood, from things strangled, and from sexual immorality.” ²⁶ Then Paul took the men, and the next day, having been purified with them, entered the temple to announce the expiration of the days of purification, at which time an offering should be made for each one of them.

a. **23-24** Leaders at Jerusalem suggest Paul take a Nazarite vow. Four men were in process, Paul would join purify himself with them and pay for their sacrifices.

i. A Nazarite vow re gratitude and consecration to God [Num.6]. Abstain from meat, wine, any corpse, don't cut hair until end of vow & then cut hair & offer as a sacrifice [Paul previously took such a vow at Corinth Ac.18]

b. **25** Leaders at Jerusalem affirm Gentiles had no duty under the Mosaic Law [Ac.15]

c. **26** Paul observes a ritual vow not to be made right with God but to try to make peace and reach Jews for Christ [**1Cor. 9:19-23**]

B. Paul persecuted [27-36]

1. Paul was falsely accused [27-29] [despite efforts for peace]

27 Now when the seven days were almost ended, the Jews from Asia, seeing him in the temple, stirred up the whole crowd and laid hands on him, **28** crying out, “Men of Israel, help! This is the man who teaches all *men* everywhere against the people, the law, and this place; and furthermore he also brought Greeks into the temple and has defiled this holy place.” **29** (For they had previously seen Trophimus the Ephesian with him in the city, whom they supposed that Paul had brought into the temple.)

27-29 Effort to make peace was futile. Paul falsely accused of teaching contra the law, temple and Jews [28] and that he took Gentiles beyond the court of the Gentiles [28-29]. Gentiles were not allowed into the court of Israel unless converted to Judaism.

2. Paul suffered as predicted [30-36]

30 And all the city was disturbed; and the people ran together, seized Paul, and dragged him out of the temple; and immediately the doors were shut. **31** Now as they were seeking to kill him, news came to the commander of the garrison that all Jerusalem was in an uproar. **32** He immediately took soldiers and centurions, and ran down to them. And when they saw the commander and the soldiers, they stopped beating Paul. **33** Then the commander came near and took him, and commanded *him* to be bound with two chains; and he asked who he was and what he had done. **34** And some among the multitude cried one thing and some another. So when he could not ascertain the truth because of the tumult, he commanded him to be taken into the barracks. **35** When he reached the stairs, he had to be carried by the soldiers because of the violence of the mob. **36** For the multitude of the people followed after, crying out, “Away with him!”

v.**30** the city in an uproar, the mob seizes Paul. Temple doors shut to protect from mob (no refuge for Paul).

v.31 the mob wanted to kill Paul [Ac.14:5-19 Lystra and Derbe; Stephen Ac.6:13]
31-32 military commander at Antonia Fortress (up to 1000 soldiers) rescued Paul from mob that was beating him. Romans have little tolerance with mobs.

33 Paul bound with chains to soldiers on both sides [prophecy fulfilled **Ac.21:11**]

a. Paul was prepared and ready [Ac.20:22-24, 21:13]

33-34 The commander wants to know what Paul did and the crowd gives conflicting answers. So the commander has Paul brought to the barracks.

35 despite the violence of the mob the disciplined Roman soldiers protect Paul

36 Multitude cried out “away with him”! 27 years before – mob to Pilate re Jesus [Lu.23:18, Jn.19:15]

3. Promised Rewards [Matt. 5:9-12] Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God. 10Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. 11“Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake.12Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Baptism

Discussion Qs:

- 1. Imagine being invited to a gay wedding, you’re concerned about endorsing or seeming to approve behavior the Bible declares wrong. Do you go? Why or why not?**
- 2. Have you experienced conflict regarding your faith and religious observance with those who don’t share your beliefs? What happened?**
- 3. Have you ever been wrongly ridiculed for your faith? Describe the experience?**
- 4. How should the promise of blessings and rewards for making peace or suffering ridicule (or persecution) motivate Christ’s followers?**